
Reeves' muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesi*) and sika deer (*Cervus nippon*) in the Netherlands

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Introduction

Both Reeves' muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesi*) and sika deer (*Cervus nippon*) are non-indigenous to the Netherlands. In other European countries these two deer species pose risks to both biodiversity and ecosystems and also generate economic damage. Sika deer has been found to interbreed with endemic red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) in Germany and England (Lammertsma et al. 2012). In areas with a high abundance of muntjacs, the species has been responsible for the decline of woodland plants like bluebells (*Hyacinthoides* sp.) (Smith-Jones 2004, The Deer Initiative 2008) and oxlip (*Primula elatior*) (Tabor 1997). By changing forest structures, the habitat of woodland butterflies and birds like the nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) may be destructed, resulting in a local decline of these species (Cooke & Farrel 2001). In high abundances, muntjacs have been found to repress roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) as a result of food competition (Chapman et al. 1994, Smith-Jones 2004).

(Dutch National Databank Flora and Fauna, www.ndff.nl); since 2008 the species has been observed more frequently. From 2008 onwards, two specimens have been living on several estates in Het Gooi, between 's-Graveland and Hilversum (Province of Utrecht) (figure 1). Most of the observations concern a single individual, but there are some reports of a male and a female together. Reproduction in the wild has not yet been documented in the Netherlands. Since the species was first observed in the wild, its distribution in the Netherlands did not change. The possibility of sika deer entering the Netherlands from Germany, where 1500 sika deer lived in seven established populations in 2005, is expected to be low (Lammertsma et al. 2012). The nearest population in Sauerland (Nordrhein-Westfalen) is located over 200 km from the Dutch border. So far, there has been no documented expansion of the species in the Netherlands. In the first three months of 2015, three sightings were reported of an escaped sika deer in the Biesbosch, in the southwest of the Netherlands.

Sika deer

The first observations of sika deer in the Netherlands in the wild date from 2005

Reeves' muntjac

The first confirmed sightings of Reeves' muntjac in the Netherlands date from the period

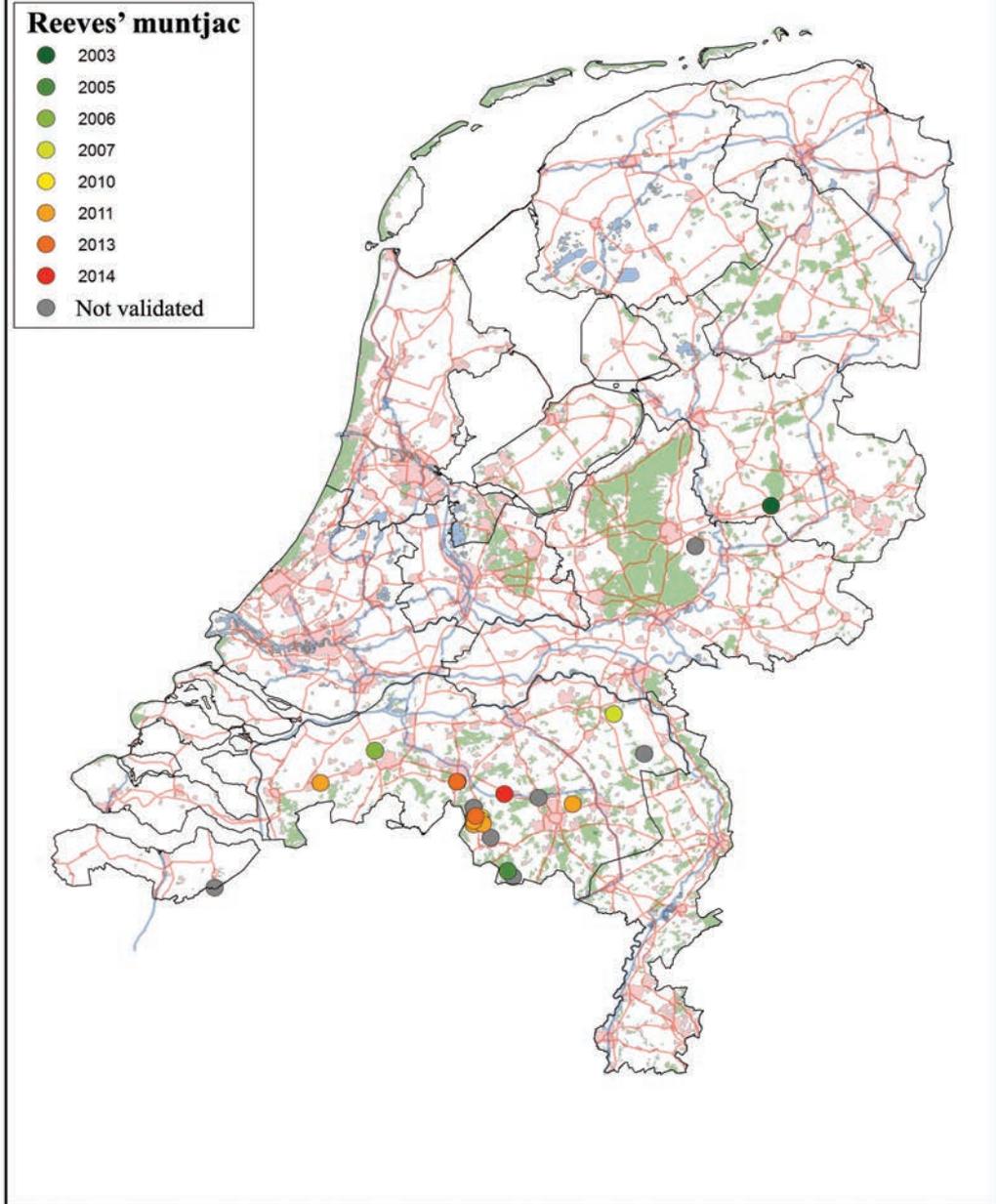


Figure 2. Observations of Reeves' muntjacs in the period 1997-2012 in the Netherlands (source: Dutch National Databank Flora and Fauna, www.ndff.nl).

1997-1998, when the species was reported from the Veluwe (Province of Gelderland) and from east of the river IJssel (Achterhoek, Province of Overijssel). Currently small numbers of Reeves' muntjac are still present at the Veluwe, but from other parts of the Netherlands only very few observations have been reported (figure 2). In 2013 and 2014, only three sightings have been documented from the Veluwe: one in the northern part near Nunspeet and two in the eastern part near Voorst. It is thought that these animals were released by private owners or escaped from animal parks. The number of observations since 2010 was smaller than in the period 2000-2005.

In the Province of Noord-Brabant, the situation is completely different (figure 2). The first muntjacs have been reported here in 2005 and since then, their numbers have been growing. Most observations come from the country estate De Utrecht and surrounding areas (south of Tilburg) and concerned single animals. A first case of a mother and a fawn was reported in 2013, near Goirle. It appeared that the fawn was born in the wild, but there were no indications that mating happened in the wild (Koelman 2014). Other observations in Noord-Brabant concern only single individuals at various locations. Only in the Maashorst, in eastern Noord-Brabant, multiple sightings were recorded: one in 2006 and one in October 2014.

Late 2013/early 2014, a muntjac was observed on several days at several locations near the Belgium border at the village of Heikant in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen (Province of Zeeland).

The increasing number of muntjac observations in the southern part of the Province of Noord-Brabant is possibly related to the growing number of animals in Belgium (Hollander 2014); while only few observations were made here until 2012, the number increased to 12 in 2013 and to 24 in 2014. Most of these observations are concentrated east of Antwerp, but some come from the country estate De Utrecht near the Belgian border.

On 7 October 2014, a young male muntjac fell victim to a car accident at country estate Baest near Oirschot (Province of Noord-Brabant) (figure 3). Traffic victims may be a first indication for higher abundances (Chapman et al. 1994). When the abundance is low, the number of traffic victims is limited due to the muntjac's secretive way of living. The species may therefore remain unnoticed for a long time.

Trade and possession

Muntjacs and sika deer are both kept in small numbers in the Netherlands in zoos, animal parks and by private people. Since 2000 the trade and possession of muntjacs is forbidden in the Netherlands and zoos need a licence for keeping these animals (Hollander 2013). Monitoring of websites providing trade of exotic mammals shows that sika deer were offered at least six times in the Netherlands in 2014, comprising a total of 13 individuals. Muntjacs are not offered on Dutch websites, while in Belgium several individuals were offered on websites in 2014 in at least three occasions. In Germany a *Muntiacus reevesi micrurus* (a Taiwanese subspecies) was offered. This subspecies is currently not known to be kept as a pet animal in the Netherlands. Muntjacs may also be intentionally released in the wild for hunting purposes in Belgium and the Province of Noord-Brabant. Both sika deer and muntjac are frequently being imported from the United Kingdom and Germany into Belgium (Baiwy et al. 2013).

On the first of February 2015 a so-called Positive List has come into effect in the Netherlands. This list restricts the possession of some, explicitly mentioned, exotic animals (Ministerie van Economische Zaken 2015). As from 1 April 2015, ten (sub-)species of muntjac are listed as prohibited to be kept. Sika deer is not mentioned on the Positive List, either 'positive' (allowed) or 'negative' (prohibited).

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Samenvatting

Muntjak en sikahert in Nederland

Muntjak (*Muntiacus reevesi*) en sikahert (*Cervus nippon*) zijn hertensoorten die niet van nature in Nederland voorkomen. Beide soorten kunnen de biodiversiteit negatief beïnvloeden, zoals in andere Europese landen reeds is gebeleden. Het sikahert kan kruisen met het inheemse edelhert. Muntjaks kunnen schade toebrengen aan zeldzame bosplanten en door overbegrazing de vegetatiestructuur zodanig veranderen, dat effecten optreden op diverse insecten- en vogelsoorten. Daarnaast kan bij hoge dichtheden het ree worden verdrongen. Dit artikel bespreekt de status van beide soorten in Nederland. Het sikahert komt vanaf 2008 voor in 's Graveland (maximaal twee individuen). Sinds begin 2015 wordt een dier regelmatig gezien in de Biesbosch. Het voorkomen van de muntjak in Nederland is sinds 1998 bekend van met name de Veluwe (recent niet meer) en Noord-Brabant (in toenemende mate) en enkele andere locaties. Van beide soorten is (nog) niet bekend dat zij zich voortplanten in Nederland. Muntjak en sikahert worden beide in kleine aantallen gehouden door particulieren, in hertenparkjes en in dierentuinen. Sinds 2000 is de handel in muntjaks verboden in Nederland. De zogenoemde Positieflijst, die 1 april 2015 in werking trad, verbiedt het houden van tien (onder)soorten van muntjak; sikahert staat niet op deze lijst.

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Figure 3. This Reeves' muntjac fell victim to a car accident near country estate Baest near Oirschot (Province of Noord-Brabant). *Photo: M. van Roessel.*